



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF
 VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS**

101 N. 14TH ST, 17TH FLOOR
 RICHMOND VA 23219

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Fleet Reserve Association
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Military Officers Association of America
Military Order of the World Wars
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Paralyzed Veterans of America
Reserve Officers Association
Roanoke Valley Veterans Council
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Vietnam Veterans of America
Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association
Virginia National Guard Association
Women Marines Association

Summary of 2022 JLC Initiatives

Policy papers for each initiative can be accessed on the JLC webpage at:
<https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/dvs/joint-leadership-council-veterans-service-organizations-2>

Initiative	Recommendation
JLC 2022-01 <i>Suicide Prevention among SMVF</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly approve funding and corresponding legislation to create a dedicated (Service Members, Veterans, and their Families) SMVF coordinator position in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to continue to unify efforts in this area; build on efforts to identify, screen for risk, and refer to resources; to research, study and provide timely data on actual method/cause of suicides in the Commonwealth; to help roll out an online training tool for front-line providers; and to continue to build public awareness in this area.
JLC 2022-02 <i>Expand Tax Relief for Surviving Spouses of Military Service Members to also include "Died in the Line-of-Duty"</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly approve legislation that extends the real estate tax exemption for the surviving spouses of military service members who die while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States of America to include those whose deaths were found to be "within the line of duty," as determined by the Department of Defense.
JLC 2022-03 <i>VSO Color and Honor Guards</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly amend §18.2-433.2 to grant an exemption to Veteran Service Organizations performing authorized color guard activities such as parades or dedication ceremonies and honor guard activities such as funerals or dedication ceremonies as well as the teaching, training, and practices necessary to achieve and maintain a level of professional proficiency.
JLC 2022-04 <i>Increase GF Support for State Veterans Cemeteries; Eliminate Spouse Burial Fees</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$300,000 (GF) to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services so that the spouse burial charge may be eliminated at Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries, and that Virginia work with Congress to secure the funding (in the VA budget) to extend the VA plot allowance to spouses at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.

Adopted September 9,
 2021

JLC 2022-05 <i>Promote Hiring of National Guard and Reserve Members</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly approve \$50,000 to create a grant program to incentivize small to medium-sized Virginia employers to hire members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves.
JLC 2022-06 <i>Virginia National Guard State Park Admission</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly grant free or reduced price admission to Virginia State parks to members of the Virginia National Guard.
JLC 2022-07 <i>Virginia National Guard Income Tax Exemption</i>	That the Governor and General Assembly adjust increase the amount of income excluded from State Income Tax from \$3,000 to \$5,000, and that this amount be adjusted every five years to account for inflation.



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Approved September 9,
2021

Position Paper 2022-01

Suicide Prevention among SMVF

OBJECTIVE: To maintain momentum on state-level efforts to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) in the Commonwealth of Virginia by hiring a dedicated veterans suicide prevention coordinator; building on efforts to identify, screen, and refer for services; creating a unified, cohesive system for data collection and analysis; and continuing efforts to build public awareness.

BACKGROUND:

- The Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (Governor's Challenge) has yielded success in coordinating the efforts of state, federal, and local government agencies, non-profits, and other partners to prevent suicide, but a dedicated state SMVF prevention coordinator in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) is critical for sustained effort;
- A key priority for the Governor's Challenge team is to identify and screen for suicide risk. *Virginia's Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR)* pilot is yielding results, but more effort in this area is needed.
- Virginia has a patchwork system of collecting and analyzing current suicide data. Currently available suicide data is often several years old. More timely information – from VISR and from state and federal resources, is needed.
- Understanding and assessing the results of suicide prevention efforts is a challenge. A publicly-reported/accessible means of assessing effectiveness of SMVF suicide-prevention efforts is warranted.
- Suicidal individuals are often hesitant to seek help. Increasing public awareness and providing training to front-line workers will help.

DISCUSSION:

- A dedicated SMVF suicide prevention coordinator should be hired to accomplish these objectives:
 - Promote a centralized data collection point and determine current lethal means of suicide among SMVF in Virginia;

- Collect additional data regarding suicide prevention awareness efforts to help determine best practices and focus future efforts;
- In conjunction with other state agencies, continue to develop effective protocols for suicide risk screening and delivery of life saving services for perceived suicidal individuals; and
- With partner agencies, develop an online training program to provide basic crisis skills and suicide risk screening to community services providers, Veterans Service Organizations, and other partners.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly approve funding and corresponding legislation to create a dedicated SMVF coordinator position in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to continue to unify efforts in this area; build on efforts to identify, screen for risk, and refer to resources; to research, study and provide timely data on actual method/cause of suicides in the Commonwealth; to help roll out an online training tool for front-line providers; and to continue to build public awareness in this area.



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Position Paper 2022-02 **Expand Tax Relief for Surviving Spouses of Military Service Members to also include “Died in the Line-of-Duty”**

OBJECTIVE: To expand tax relief for Surviving Spouses of Military Service Members to also include “Died in the Line-of-Duty.”

BACKGROUND:

- Virginia Code Title 58.1, Chapter 32, section 58-1-3219.9, provides a real estate tax exemption for the surviving spouse of a member of the United States Armed Forces who was *Killed in Action* as determined by the U.S. Department of Defense.
- Virginia Code Title 58.1, Chapter 32, section 58-1-3219.5, provides a real estate tax exemption for the surviving spouse of a veteran who was determined by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs to have a *100% service-connected permanent and total disability*, and who occupied the real property as his or her principal place of residence.
- There is a very small gap between these two groups of surviving spouses: the surviving spouses of military service members who died in the *line-of-duty*, but who were not killed in action, are not eligible for an exemption.
- Examples of line-of-duty deaths include service members who:
 - Die in pre-deployment training exercises;
 - Are killed in airplane and helicopter crashes; and
 - Die in non-combat-related vehicle crashes, while in a combat zone.
- According to information provided by the Department of Defense, the number of surviving spouses in Virginia who were receiving Servicemen’s Group Life Insurance (SGLI) benefits due to the death of their military service member is very low:

Year	Number of SGLI recipients in Virginia
2018	40
2019	44
2020	31

- Only about 1% of Americans currently serve in our Armed Forces

DISCUSSION:

- The real estate tax exemption should be extended to cover the surviving spouses of military service members who died while on active duty whose deaths were found to be “*within the line of duty.*” This classification requires the investigation into the death to demonstrate that the service member did nothing dishonorable to the service that resulted in the service member’s death.
- Of the number of surviving spouses cited above, it is likely that not all of them own a Virginia home. It is also likely that at least some of them have moved out of state. But even if all remained in Virginia and all own a home, the number of surviving spouses is low.
- This fiscal impact on any one local government in the Commonwealth will therefore be small.
- The impact on the quality of life for the surviving spouse is immense.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly approve legislation that extends the real estate tax exemption for the surviving spouses of military service members who die while serving on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States of America to include those whose deaths were found to be “*within the line of duty,*” as determined by the Department of Defense.



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Position Paper 2022-03 VSO Color and Honor Guards

OBJECTIVE: To address concerns expressed by members of Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) participating in color guard or honor guard activities.

BACKGROUND:

- During the 2020 session of the Virginia General Assembly, a bill was passed amending §18.2-433.2 of the Code of Virginia. The new law would make it a Class 5 felony for any person to teach or demonstrate to any other person the use, application, or making of any firearm ... or technique capable of causing injury or death to persons...
- We are concerned that the legislation will inadvertently criminalize Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) honor guards, color guards, or rifle teams as they perform their duties, which are focused on providing a dignified final salute to our veterans or thanking and recognizing the contributions that veterans and military service made in the service of our country at public ceremonies.
- Our concern is that a VSO honor guard, color guard, or rifle team member may be inadvertently identified as a member of a paramilitary organization and held liable for inducing fear in another person while displaying or firing volleys at a veteran's funeral or other ceremony, or even a VSO color guard or rifle team participating in a local parade or other ceremony.

DISCUSSION:

- The use of rifles accompanying the American flag and the service flags of the United States has been recognized for many years as a tradition. Further the rendering of three rifle volleys followed by *Taps* has been a tradition at military funerals since the Civil War when the three volleys were used to tell opposing forces that the wounded and dead had been removed from the battlefield.
- An update to the Code of Virginia is needed to ensure our VSO honor guards, color guards, and rifle teams, which are comprised of volunteers from VSOs across the Commonwealth, are exempted from any inadvertent impact of the new statute.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly amend §18.2-433.2 to grant an exemption to Veteran Service Organizations performing authorized color guard activities such as parades or dedication ceremonies and honor guard activities such as funerals or dedication ceremonies as well as the teaching, training, and practices necessary to achieve and maintain a level of professional proficiency.



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Position Paper 2022-04 **Increase GF Support for State Veterans Cemeteries;** **Eliminate Spouse Burial Fees**

OBJECTIVE: To provide an additional \$300,000 (GF) per fiscal year to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services so that the spousal burial fee may be eliminated at Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries.

BACKGROUND:

- National Cemeteries operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), such as the ones in Culpeper and Quantico, are 100% federal funded;
 - The VA does not charge a burial fee for Veterans;
 - The VA does not charge a burial fee for spouses.
- The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) operates three state veterans cemeteries – in Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk.
 - VDVS does not charge a burial fee for Veterans. VDVS receives a one-time partial reimbursement (known as a plot allowance) from the VA that covers a portion of VDVS cemetery operations. The remainder is funded by the General Fund.
 - VDVS charges a \$400 spouse burial fee to support cemetery operations and maintenance. The VA does not provide any funding for spouses buried at state veterans cemeteries.
- Operational funding for Virginia's state veterans cemeteries comes from the VA plot allowance (approximately 45%), the Commonwealth's General Fund (approximately 45%), and the spouse burial fee (approximately 10%).

DISCUSSION:

- A long standing Veterans benefit provided by the VA is a final resting place for eligible Veterans and spouses in National Cemeteries that have space.
- When the National Cemeteries began to run out of space in the 1970s, the VA established a grant program for the construction of state veterans cemeteries, with a goal of placing a National, State, or Tribal veterans cemetery within 75 miles of 95% of the population. Since 1978, many states have established their own Veteran Cemeteries to ensure that this benefit is available to their Veterans.
- VA grants funded the construction of three state veterans cemeteries in Virginia (Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk), which are operated by the Virginia

Department of Veterans Services. VA has also awarded Virginia several grants for phased expansion.

- Between 700-800 spouses per year are buried at Virginia's state veterans cemeteries. The spouse burial fee provides critical funding that directly supports the operations and maintenance of our cemeteries, including salaries for 42 employees (36 full-time, 6 wage).
- There is a disparity between National Veterans Cemeteries in Virginia (no charge for spouse burials) and Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries (\$400 charge).
- The VDVS budget should be increased by \$300,000 (GF) per fiscal year so that this disparity can be eliminated at Virginia's three state veterans cemeteries.
- Virginia should work with its federal elected officials to extend the VA plot allowance to spouses buried at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly appropriate an additional \$300,000 (GF) to the Virginia Department of Veterans Services so that the spouse burial charge may be eliminated at Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries, and that Virginia work with Congress to secure the funding (in the VA budget) to extend the VA plot allowance to spouses at all state veterans cemeteries nationwide.



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2021

Position Paper 2022-05

Promote Hiring of National Guard and Reserve Members

OBJECTIVE: To promote the hiring of members of the Virginia National Guard and the Reserves by recognizing Virginia employers who hire our citizen-soldiers.

BACKGROUND:

- Members of the Virginia National Guard and the Armed Forces Reserves are citizen-soldiers, meaning that when they are not serving on federal or state missions, they are in their communities and working to support their families.
- As a Commonwealth and a Nation, it is important that we recognize our employers who hire our citizen-soldiers. One way to do this is through a small-scale grant to encourage and incentivize hiring.
- After the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program was established, the Governor and General Assembly authorized the creation of a grant program to recognize small to medium-sized employers that hire Virginia veterans.
- If a Guardsman or Reservist serves on federal active duty, they earn Veterans status. Employers who hire these members of the Guard and Reserve would qualify for a V3 employer grant.
- However, if a Guardsman or Reservist is not called to federal active duty, they are not considered a Veteran. Employers who hire them do not qualify for the V3 grant program.

DISCUSSION:

- This proposal seeks to build on the V3 Program employer grant model by awarding a one-time grant of \$1,000 to a Virginia employer who hires a member of the Virginia National Guard or the Armed Forces Reserves.
- Extending eligibility for a V3-type grant to Virginia employers who hire Virginia's citizen-soldiers will both incentivize hiring of these talented individuals and recognize the vital dual role played by citizen-soldiers in our work places and our Commonwealth.
- The JLC recommends a small-scale initial investment of \$50,000 in FY22, sufficient to award 50 grants of \$1,000 each. The Departments of Veterans Services and Military Affairs would report back to the Governor and General Assembly of the demand for this grant, and whether any shortfalls exist that should be addressed in future fiscal years.

- The JLC recommends that the eligibility requirements for the \$1,000 grant be modeled on the V3 employer grant requirements, including the requirement that the employee be retained for one-year prior to the employer applying for the grant.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly approve \$50,000 to create a grant program to incentivize small to medium-sized Virginia employers to hire members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves.



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Position Paper 2022-06 **Virginia National Guard State Park Admission**

OBJECTIVE: To ensure Virginia's continued commitment to the men and women of the Virginia National Guard by offering free or reduced price entrance to state parks for all Virginia National Guard members.

BACKGROUND:

- Federal parks offer free admission for all National Guard members.
- Numerous states offer free admission to state parks for their National Guard members. Some states extend this to Guard members from out of state for example:
 - Thousands of Virginia Soldiers will mobilize through installations in Texas in 2021 and 2022.
 - They are able to visit all of the State parks in Texas without paying an entrance fee.
 - Those same Soldiers have to pay a fee to use a state park in Virginia.
- This year alone approximately 1,500 members of the Virginia National Guard were mobilized in response to COVID-19 and civil disturbance response throughout the Commonwealth.
- As of June 30, 2021, there were 8,671 members for the Virginia Army National Guard (7,152 Soldiers) and the Virginia Air National Guard (1,519 Airmen).

DISCUSSION:

- Offering free or reduced state park admission for members of the Virginia National Guard recognizes their continued service to the Commonwealth during times of need.
- There will be a cost to the state (i.e. foregone revenue for the state park system) of providing this recognition, but the costs should be relatively low.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly grant free or reduced price admission to Virginia State parks to members of the Virginia National Guard.



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Position Paper 2022-07 **Virginia National Guard Income Tax Exemption**

OBJECTIVE: To adjust Virginia's income tax exemption for Virginia National Guard members from \$3,000 to \$5,000.

BACKGROUND:

- Virginia exempts the first \$3,000 of National Guard pay from State Income Taxes.
- The benefit applies to all enlisted pay grades (E1-E9), warrant officer pay grades (W1-W5) and for officer pay grades of O1-O3.
- The current exemption of \$3,000 has been in place since 1994. If this benefit were indexed to inflation the amount would now equal \$4,800.
- As of June 30, 2021, there were 8,671 members for the Virginia Army National Guard (7,152 Soldiers) and the Virginia Air National Guard (1,519 Airmen).

DISCUSSION:

- The Virginia National Guard consistently competes with neighboring states to retain and maintain our National Guard forces. Virginia also competes with the Active Duty forces for many of the qualified recruits in the state.
- The role and requirements for the Virginia National Guard have steadily increased in the last 20 years, resulting in the Commonwealth's greatest operations temp since the Second World War for our National Guard forces.
- Increasing the exemption from \$3,000 to \$5,000 will help with recruiting and retention and will recognize the service of Virginia's citizen-soldiers to our Commonwealth.
- Further adjustments should be made every five years to keep up with inflation.
- There will be a fiscal impact (foregone state taxes) of this proposal, but the costs should be relatively low, and will be more than offset by maintaining a strong Virginia National Guard, ready to respond to respond during pandemics, natural disasters, and other emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Governor and General Assembly increase the amount of income excluded from State Income Tax from \$3,000 to \$5,000, and that this amount be adjusted every five years to account for inflation.